

## TWELVE VINTAGES of CLONAKILLA SHIRAZ VIOGNIER

Clonakilla led the Canberra district on its rise to prominence with “cool” shiraz, and, although some worthy challengers have emerged, the Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier remains the regional hero. Tim Kirk and Bryan Martin, the Clonakilla winemaking team, hosted the Winewise crew to celebrate our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and their gift to us was the latest dozen vintages of Shiraz Viognier.



*Tim Kirk*

The Clonakilla style is very much medium-bodied and perfumed. Sometimes I catch more than a glimpse of Côte Rôtie. Other times it's Gevrey-Chambertin – even though pinot noir has no part in the make-up of the wine. When I'm tasting barrels with Tim, I sometimes notice a smile of agreement if I mention Côte Rôtie, and the smile broadens if I draw parallels with Vosne-Romanée or Gevrey-Chambertin.

Viognier, on average five per-cent, is a vital part of the blend, and whole-bunch fermentation also plays its role, but there is never a plan for it to steal the show.

Sourcing of oak is an on-going project for Clonakilla – as it should be. The vineyard blocks vary in age, vintage variation must be dealt with, and the level of toasting in barrels is very much a moving target. Juggler Tim has a lot of skittles in the air at every given moment, but that is the essence of creating wine of excellence and beauty.

Though all wine-making begins in the vineyard, it's the myriad decisions that are made among the vines and in the winery that, along with the hand nature deals, determine the quality of any wine. Sometimes the correct call is to not be rushed and to leave things as they are. There is a placidness about both Tim and Bryan that assures me haste plays no part in the Clonakilla temperament.

## SHIRAZ VIOGNIER – All wines under screwcap

**2003** It's quite mature and spicy. A little imagination conjures links to nebbiolo, especially in terms of the fading rose petal aromas and lingering tannins. The palate is slightly lean, showing its acid on the finish. Dryness is taking over. ★★★

**2004** This wine pleased me at our previous meeting over dinner (Vol.28 No.4, October 2012) but time has rung alarm bells. While it retains some spicy dark berry flavour, leathery influences have emerged and the finish is fairly hard. ★★☆☆

**2005** Hands across the ocean – all the way to Ampuis, France. There is a definite link to Côte Rôtie here, especially in terms of the fragrance and spiciness. This is an impressively fresh and fine wine with a lingering finish. Lovely. ★★★★★

**2006** A vibrant, comparatively unevolved wine which evokes thoughts of cherries and Asian spices. The palate is exciting, long and fine. As good as the 2005 is, this is the first glimpse of Clonakilla greatness. ★★★★★☆

**2007** This delightful wine reinforces the promise of the 2006. It's cherries. It's violets. If anything, the toasty oak is a little too obvious, but there's so much that's good about this wine. In two decades' time it may be regarded as one of the very best. ★★★★★☆

**2008** There's a lot happening here, and it's all good. Vintage 2008 is "Burgundian" – rose petals, intense cherry, a suggestion of stems and a very fine, silky palate. There will be even more to enjoy in the years to come. Is this the archetype Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier? ★★★★★★

**2009** Another Murrumbateman burgundy! The perfumed red fruits nose carries the whole-bunch complexity effortlessly, and the textural elegance is a sheer delight. It's slightly more evolved than the 2008, but no less a wine. ★★★★★★

**2010** After a roller coaster of a growing period, harvest was affected by untimely rain in 2010. Although the nose of this wine offers red fruits characteristics, it doesn't sing with the enchanting voice of the 2008 or 2009. The palate is of adequate intensity and length, with a fairly firm finish. A sound, respectable wine with a limited future. ★★★

**2011** Rain blighted this vintage more than it did in 2010, and the fact that such a charming wine was made says much about the talent of the Clonakilla crew. A decision not to use any whole bunches was wise. The perfume of the nose is prelude to a palate that lacks a little weight in the middle, but still represents Murrumbateman shiraz with pride. ★★★★★☆



*Clonakilla logo from the Book of Durrow (7<sup>th</sup> century AD)*

**2012** This is a beautifully perfumed wine with a whiff of whole bunch. A maker of Côte Rôtie would identify with it immediately. It's delightfully delicate, but is prodigiously long and remarkably fine. One of the Clonakilla crown jewels. (\$103.00) ★★★★★

<http://www.mwwines.com.au>

**2013** Another vintage with that elusive ethereal quality and beguiling perfume. It has everything, but not too much of anything. (\$90.00)

★★★★★

<http://www.clonakilla.com.au/order/>

**2014** Rose petals and more rose petals – fragrant dark cherry too. The palate is so opulent and supple, with almost unbelievable length and finesse. (Not yet released) ★★★★★

Crisps Lane, Murrumbateman (coordinates 34°57'0"S 149°01'0"E) the location of Clonakilla, is about 40 km north of Canberra City, at about 600 m above sea level. That makes it a relatively cool environment for shiraz in Australia, but not as cool, on average, as the Yarra Valley and Geelong.

However, in vintages like 08, 09 and the triumvirate 2012-14 there is a Côte Rôtie coolness and fragrance about the Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier that I haven't noticed in other shiraz from Murrumbateman. Is it due to site, mesoclimate, picking time, clonal selection, viognier, whole bunch? All six?

Whatever the reason, the Canberra district takes pride in one of the shining stars of Australian red wine. More than 20 vintages prove the point, and although there is already an aura of brilliance around Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier, this star is still in its ascendancy.

**Lester Jesberg**

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